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## Trends in Skills Requirements and Work-Related Issues

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## Trends in Skills Requirements and Work-Related Issues

### Abstract

[Excerpt] The Skills and Employment Survey (SES) provides an up-to-date picture of employee perspectives across a range of themes relating to work that they are doing. Given the central importance of work to many people's lives, the findings of this survey are relevant to many areas of policy for employers, trade unions and Government. The 2012 survey follows on from previous waves and therefore comparisons can be made with earlier findings; this is especially important as the previous survey was undertaken in 2006, before the onset of the recession.

Reports including the first findings have been published on six topics:

- Skills at work in Britain;
- Training in Britain;
- Job control in Britain;
- Fear at work in Britain;
- Work intensification in Britain;
- Job-related well-being in Britain.

This report highlights some of the key findings from these reports and provides some discussion of the implications for labour markets and labour market policy in Great Britain (Northern Ireland was not included).

### Keywords

Great Britain, skills, training, labor market

### Comments

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# Trends in skills requirements and work-related issues

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About the survey  
Key Findings  
Training  
Job control  
Job-related well-being  
Fear at work  
Work intensification  
Commentary

This report is available in electronic format only.

*The first findings of the 2012 Skills and Employment Survey, published in early 2013, present an up-to-date, authoritative picture of British employees' experiences and views regarding their current work situation. The survey focuses on skill requirements, training, task discretion and job control, job-related well-being, fears over job loss and unfair treatment at work, and work intensification. In comparing the findings with those of the 2006 survey, the survey also shows the impact of the recession in both private and public sectors.*

## Introduction

The [Skills and Employment Survey](#) (SES) provides an up-to-date picture of employee perspectives across a range of themes relating to work that they are doing. Given the central importance of work to many people's lives, the findings of this survey are relevant to many areas of policy for employers, trade unions and Government. The 2012 survey follows on from previous waves and therefore comparisons can be made with earlier findings; this is especially important as the previous survey was undertaken in 2006, before the onset of the recession.

Reports including the first findings have been published on six topics:

- Skills at work in Britain;
- Training in Britain;
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- Job-related well-being in Britain.

This report highlights some of the key findings from these reports and provides some discussion of the implications for labour markets and labour market policy in Great Britain (Northern Ireland was not included).

## About the survey

The 2012 SES was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council ([ESRC](#)), the UK Commission for Employment and Skills ([UKCES](#)). The Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods ([WISERD](#)) funded a boost to the sample in Wales. The survey seeks to build on earlier ESRC-funded studies and represents a continuation of the work established through the [Social Change and Economic Life Initiative Survey \(1986\)](#), the [1992 Employment in Britain Survey](#) and the Skills Surveys ([1997](#), [2001](#) and [2006](#)).

The aim of the SES was to provide a benchmark for research in the field and to become a key resource for research into contemporary working life. Questions were largely based on those in the 2006 Skills Survey, in order to enable comparison. Findings presented in this study provide comparisons over time.

The main elements of the survey focus on skill requirements of British workplaces, workers' experiences of their jobs, and issues of job quality.

The survey aimed to provide a representative sample of people of working age living in private households in Britain. Eligibility was based on two criteria; the respondents had to be:

- aged between 20 and 65 years;
- in a paid job for at least one hour per week.

Fieldwork took place between January and November 2012 and involved face-to-face interviews undertaken by professional interviewers. Some 3,200 responses were collected from people in paid employment in Britain, representing a 49% response rate; 2,782 responses were collected in the main survey and 418 responses were generated by the Wales boost. Interviews had a mean

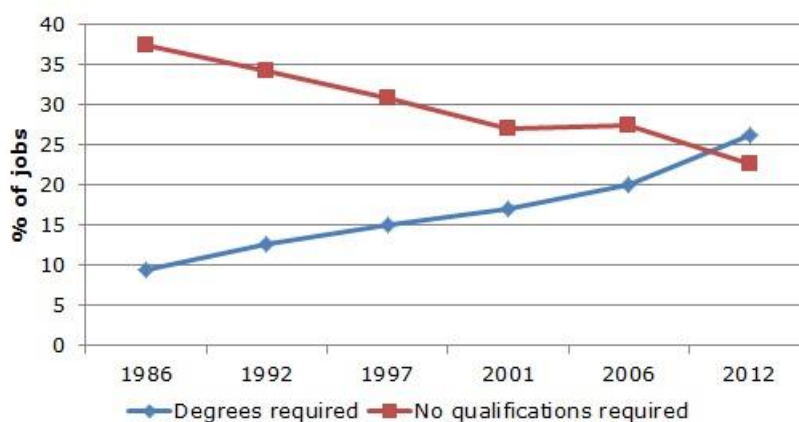
duration of 59 minutes (55 had been planned for). A [Technical Briefing \(108Kb PDF\)](#) by Felstead et al, on the design and methods of the survey, is available.

## Key Findings

### Skills at work

Previous Skills Surveys show that skill requirements for jobs rose between 1986 and 2006, by which time 20% of jobs required graduate-level qualifications. The proportion of jobs which required no qualifications fell from 38% to 28% over the same 20-year period. The qualification requirements of jobs in Britain since 2006 have continued to rise, and the rise between 2006 and 2012 was even more pronounced (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Trends in qualifications required*

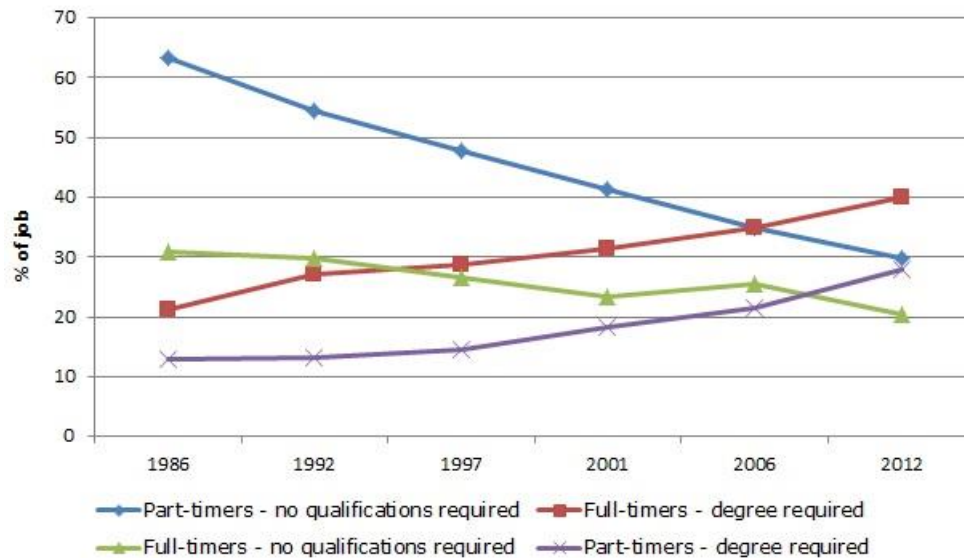


**Figure 1: Trends in qualifications required**

The 2012 survey showed jobs requiring degrees rose from 20% in 2006 to 26% and the proportion requiring no qualifications fell from 28% to 23%. There is no evidence that this change is due to employers changing their requirements in line with the expansion of higher education, whereby new recruits are required to have higher qualifications than are necessary to do the job. Three quarters of those reporting that a degree was necessary for new recruits to get a job, also said that a degree was required to do that job. This proportion has remained stable since 1986.

Qualification requirements for part-time jobs have risen more quickly than for full-time jobs (see Figure 2). The difference is most obvious when considering jobs which require no entry qualifications. In 1986, 63% of part-time jobs required no entry qualification, compared with 30% of full-time jobs. By 2012, the proportion for part-time jobs had fallen to 30%, and for full-time jobs had fallen to 20%.

*Figure 2: Trends in qualifications required by working time*



**Figure 2: Trends in qualifications required by working time**

Over-qualification is shown to have declined between 2006 and 2012, after successive rises since 1986. This may be partly attributable to the rise in graduate jobs, which rose by 1.9 million between 2006 and 2012. The reduction in over-qualification may suggest that employers are using employees' skills more effectively.

## Training

The proportion of employees undertaking some form of training rose from 65% in 2006 to 68% in 2012. The main causes of this increase were rises in 'teach yourself' training and correspondence / internet training courses.

However, although a greater proportion of workers undertook training in 2012, compared with 2006, the amount of training undertaken actually fell. Those undertaking 'long training' – more than 10 days in the year – declined from 38% to 34%, with the fall being especially noticeable among women.

Table 1 shows that participation in training varies considerably by industry. Health and social work, public administration and defence, and financial sectors each reported training participation rates of approximately 85% in 2012. By contrast the hotels and restaurant sector reported training participation rates of 44%. Other sectors all reported rates of more than 50%.

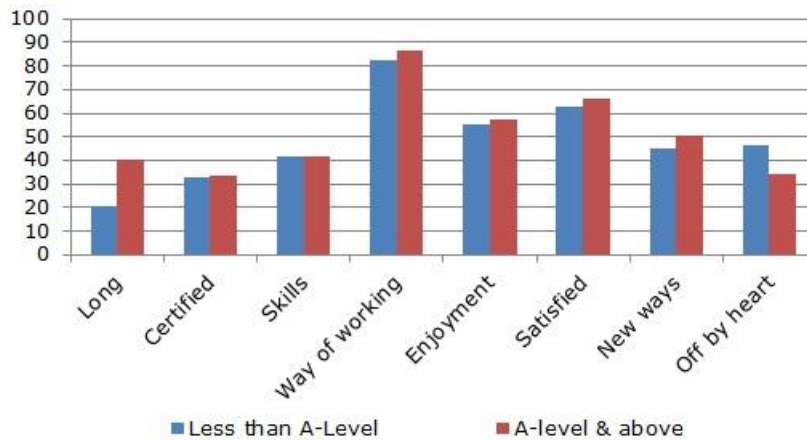
**Table 1: Participation in any training and in long training, 2006 and 2012**

	Participation in any training (%)		Participation in long training (> 10 hrs) (%)	
	2006	2012	2006	2012
<b>Industry:</b>				
<b>Manufacturing</b>	59.6	66.8	33.5	31.5
<b>Construction</b>	45.7	55.2	23.9	18.6
<b>Wholesale and retail</b>	56.1	59.0	31.3	24.8
<b>Hotels and restaurants</b>	44.2	43.6	21.0	16.2
<b>Transport, storage and communication</b>	53.5	61.4	28.5	25.9
<b>Financial</b>	81.8	84.8	54.6	57.6
<b>Real estate and business services</b>	66.3	64.4	40.6	34.2
<b>Public administration and defence</b>	82.9	85.0	45.6	53.5
<b>Education</b>	79.3	80.7	47.6	39.0
<b>Health and social work</b>	75.7	85.0	46.5	45.3
<b>Other community, social and personal Services</b>	56.1	57.5	35.8	26.3
<b>All industries</b>	65.1	68.3	37.7	33.5

The SES also provides measures of perceived training quality. Between 2006 and 2012 there were only small changes in the proportion of employees for whom training was certified, or who significantly improved their skills or improved their way of working. There were falls, however, since 2006, in the proportion of employees who reported that training had increased their enjoyment of working (from 60% to 57%) and also in the proportion who were satisfied with the training they received (from 44% to 39%).

Training also varies by levels of prior education, which suggests that skill differences are reinforced, because it is concentrated in the already more highly educated groups (see Those educated to A-level (the highest level of qualification for 18 year olds) and above, are twice as likely to receive long training as those who do not have this level of qualification. The more highly educated employees are also more likely to say in their responses that the training helps them to find new ways of working, improves their way of working, and increases enjoyment. They are also more likely to be satisfied with the training that they have received. In contrast, the lower educated group are more likely to report that their training involves learning established routines ‘off by heart’.

*Figure 3: Perceived training quality by prior education level, 2012*



**Figure 3: Perceived training quality by prior education level, 2012**

Demand for training rose between 2006 and 2012 from 24% to 29%. Demand is linked to having previously faced a barrier to training; for those who did not receive training in 2012, 37% of those people whose employer did not provide the desired training wanted a course, compared with 16% for whom there had been no such barrier.

## Job control

The issue of job control and the degree of influence which employees have over decisions which affect them at work have been shown to be important for both employee motivation and psychological well-being. SES 2012 included a range of indicators for different forms of job control, relating to individual task discretion, semi-autonomous teamwork and organisational participation.

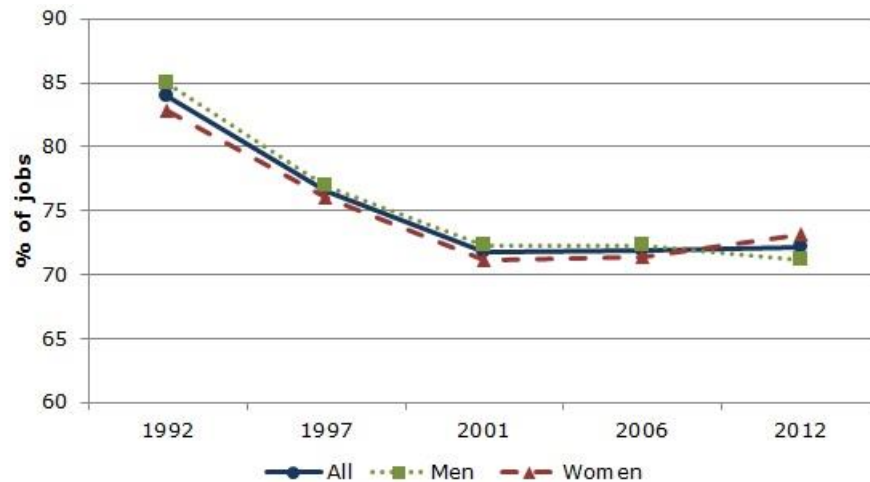
For task discretion, respondents were asked four questions to determine the amount of influence they believed they had over specific aspects of their jobs:

- how hard they work,
- deciding what tasks to do;
- how the tasks are done;
- the quality standards to which they work.

For each of these measures, responses were elicited on a four point scale ranging from 0 'not much at all' to 3 'a great deal'. A summary index was created by taking the average score for the four items. Scores of 2 or higher were taken to denote high discretion jobs.

*Figure 4: Task discretion*





**Figure 4: Task discretion**

Figure 4 shows that task discretion declined throughout the 1990s, and has remained fairly stable since 2001. Throughout previous waves of the survey, women were less likely to be in high discretion jobs compared with men. As the proportions reporting high discretion fell during the 1990s, men and women experienced falls in levels of task discretion. By 2012, however, a greater percentage of women than men reported that they worked in high discretion jobs.

Differences in levels of task discretion are evident by contract status, occupation and education, but with some changes in the extent of difference over time. Although levels of task discretion for part-time and temporary employees remained lower than those for full-time and permanent employees, respectively, between 1992 and 2012, the difference narrowed between 2006 and 2012.

Results from the earlier Skills Surveys had suggested that the level of discretion experienced by employees was closely linked to skill levels. For all waves of the survey, managers report the highest levels of discretion are experienced by professionals (average scores of 2.52 and 2.23 in 2012, respectively). Operatives and those in elementary occupations had the lowest influence over their work (average scores of 1.75 and 1.94 in 2012, respectively). This order of difference has persisted over time.

Education has traditionally been a good indicator of task discretion. Those with A levels reported an average discretion score of 2.21 in 2012, compared with 2.15 for those without. The gap between the higher and lower qualified groups has, however, narrowed over time. In 1992 the scores stood at 2.53 and 2.36, respectively, meaning that the decline has been steeper for the first group.

Teamwork was explored by asking whether individuals usually work alone or with one or more people in a similar position to theirs. For those that did work in teams, further questions were asked about the decision-making scope of the team using the same '0' to '3' indicators as for individual task discretion. Again, summary scores were created by taking an average of these measures. Those teams which averaged '2' or higher were categorised as 'semi-autonomous'.

From 2006, further questions were asked to determine the degree of self-management of these teams on the following issues:

- selecting group members;
- selecting group leaders;
- selecting targets for the group.

Again, these measures were scored on a '0' to '3' four-point scale and those scoring '2', or higher, were categorised as 'self-managing teams'.

The results show that team working has increased steadily between 1992 and 2012, from 47% of all employees to 63%. The proportion of workers in semi-autonomous teams fell between 1992 and 2006, but increased from 14% in 2006 to 18% in 2012. Self-managing teams increased from 4% in 2006 to 7% in 2012. Interestingly, and perhaps counter intuitively, the surveys found that teamwork as such, is not associated with greater levels of job control. It is the type of team-working that matters. There is sharp difference, however, between those working in semi-autonomous teams and those who do not. Reported task discretion is greater among the semi-autonomous teams than either self-managing teams or those not working in teams. However, those not working in teams report greater task discretion than those in non-autonomous teams. The same pattern holds for those working in self-managed teams. The scores for semi-autonomous teams declined between 1992 and 2001, but increased in 2006 and again in 2012. For self-managing teams, the two available waves (2006 and 2012) show stable scores at a higher level of task discretion than for non self-managed teams.

The questions about organisational participation show that the proportions of employees with access to consultative meetings, has continued to rise (see Figure 5). There were declines between 2006 and 2012 in participation in quality circles, and also in the proportion of employees who felt they had a great deal, or quite a lot, of say over changes to work organisation. The 2012 survey also found some evidence of the range of topics covered at consultative meetings being more narrowly defined by management than had previously been the case. This replicates other findings ([TN1009029S](#)) which have pointed towards a hollowing out of these consultative structures.

Figure 5: Organisational participation

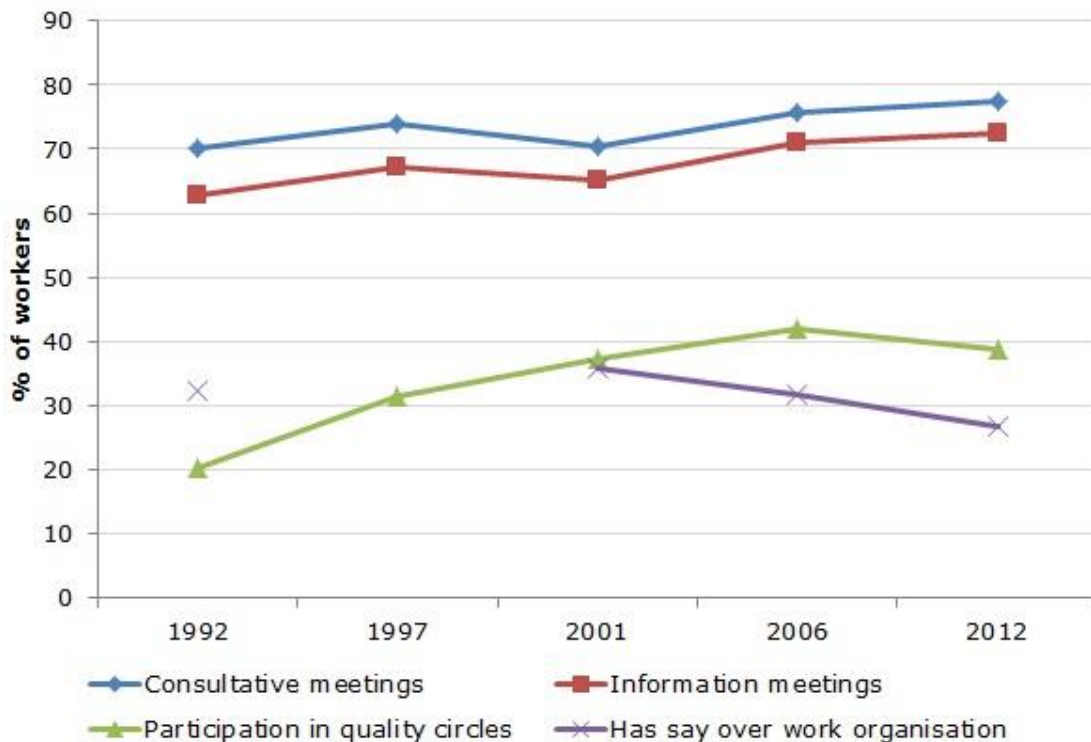


Figure 5: Organisational participation

## Job-related well-being

The job-related well-being scores go beyond self-reported measures of levels of satisfaction (or otherwise) with the job. Concepts have been developed along two scales to measure different aspects of the feelings which are experienced at work by employees.

- The Enthusiasm scale runs from depression (low pleasure, low arousal) to enthusiasm (high pleasure, high arousal).
- The Contentment scale runs from anxiety (low pleasure, high arousal) to contentment (high pleasure, low arousal).

Measures of both enthusiasm and contentment were against a six-point scale, where respondents were asked to say how often, over the past few weeks, their job had made them feel a range of emotions from 'never' to 'all of the time'. These measures were then averaged to give a score on a scale from 1 to 6.

Measures (again using the six-point scale) were also taken of job stress, asking respondents three questions about how often they experienced 'worry about job problems', 'difficulty to unwind at the end of a workday', or 'feeling used up at the end of a workday'.

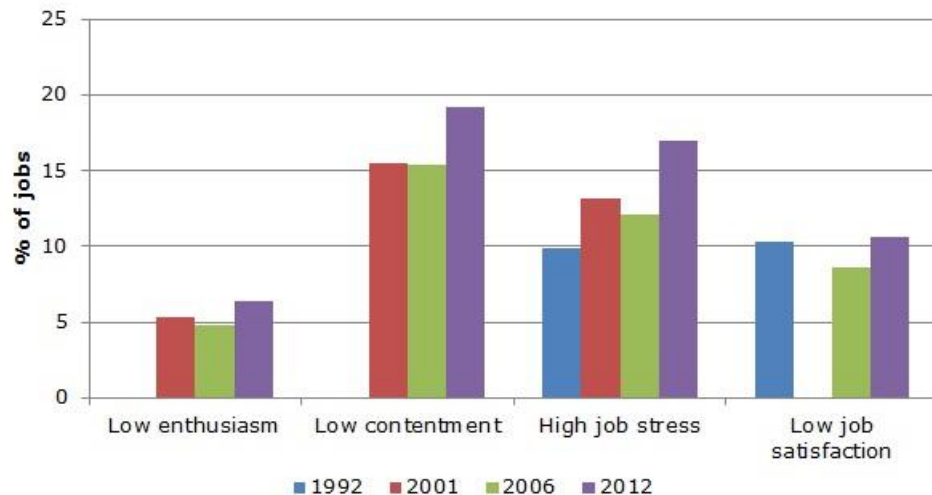
Job satisfaction was measured using a scale, ranging from 0 'completely dissatisfied' to 6 'completely satisfied', applied to 14 different areas of working life, including, pay, job security and the friendliness of co-workers.

Figure 6 shows that the proportions of workers at the low end of the enthusiasm scale increased marginally from 5% in 2006 to 6% in 2012. There was a much more noticeable rise in the

proportion at the low end of the contentment scale, which increased to 19% in 2012 from 15% in 2006.

The proportion reporting high levels of job stress increased from 12% to 17% between 2006 and 2012. Those reporting a low level of job satisfaction increased from 9% to 11% over the same period.

*Figure 6: Low job-related well-being*



**Figure 6: Low job-related well-being**

## Fear at work

SES2012 identifies three dimensions of fear at work ([UK13090191](#)):

- fear of employment loss;
- fear of unfair treatment;
- fear of job status loss.

Fear of employment loss is assessed through the question ‘do you think there is any chance at all of you losing your job and becoming unemployed in the next 12 months?’ Respondents who answered ‘yes’ were then asked to assess the likelihood of this from options ranging from ‘very likely’ to ‘very unlikely’.

Three items were used to assess the fear of unfair treatment. Respondents were asked how anxious they were about:

- being dismissed without good reason;
- being discriminated against;
- being victimised by management.

They were asked to give responses on a four point scale from ‘very anxious’ to ‘not anxious at all’.

The same scale was used to look at concerns about changes to their job resulting in a loss of job status. Again, the introductory sentences asked employees, ‘How anxious are you about:

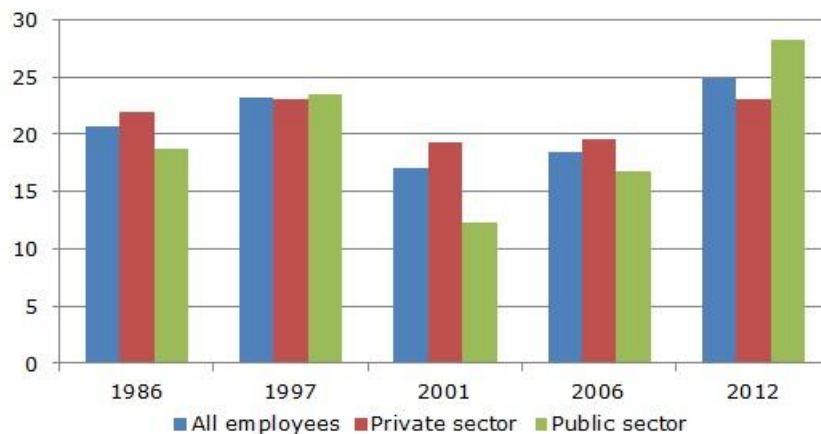
- future changes to my job that may give me less say over how it is done;
- future changes to my job that may make it more difficult to use my skills and abilities;
- future changes that may reduce my pay;

- being transferred to a less interesting job in the organisation.

Fear of employment loss in 2012 was higher than at any other point across the previous waves of the survey (see Figure 7). There were increases between 2001 and 2006, but the increase between 2006 and 2012 was noticeably sharper. Whereas, for the two previous waves (2001 and 2006) fear of job loss was lower in the public sector than in the private sector, by 2012 public sector employees were more concerned about employment loss. There were increases in fear of employment loss in both sectors, but this was much steeper in the public sector.

Fear also increased in respect to unfair treatment for all three of the measures. Fear of arbitrary dismissal scores the highest of the three for all employees, and for private and public sector employees, as it did in 2000. Fear of victimisation by management is the next highest measure in the 2012 survey, whereas it scored lower than fear of discrimination in 2000 (when it was measured by the Working in Britain Survey). This is the case for all employees and by public and private sector. Fear of victimisation among private sector employees rose from 17.0% in 2000 to 20.1% in 2012, and for public sector employees from 13.4% to 17.6% over the same period. Overall anxiety about unfair treatment increased in both the private and public sectors. The increase was larger in the public sector leading to some narrowing of the gap between the two.

*Figure 7: Fear of becoming unemployed*



**Figure 7: Fear of becoming unemployed**

The evidence relating to changes in jobs is available only for the 2012 SES. Anxiety about pay reductions was the most commonly cited aspect, with 37.4% reporting this, followed by less say in the job, which was reported by 31.5% of all employees. On these two measures the differences between the public and private sectors were the most noticeable, with gaps of nearly 10 percentage points on the issue of pay, and more than this on the measure of less say in the job. The pattern of greater anxiety in the public sector is replicated for the other two measures, but the overall levels in both public and private sectors are lower.

Table 2 shows that levels of reported employment insecurity and anxiety about unfair treatment are linked to issues which employees have experienced at work. Fears over employment loss and about unfair treatment are higher where workforce reductions or changes in work organisation have been experienced.

**Table 2: Percentage with fear at work by workforce reductions, workplace change and employee participation, 2012**

	Workforce Reductions		Changes in Work Organisation		Great deal/quite a lot of influence over changes at work	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Fear of:</b>						
<b>Employment Loss</b>	31.7	16.2	24.8	21.0	19.8	26.6
<b>Arbitrary Dismissal</b>	25.9	20.1	23.6	20.8	14.1	27.3
<b>Discrimination</b>	19.2	16.3	18.6	16.1	10.8	20.7
<b>Victimisation</b>	19.7	17.4	19.2	16.8	9.7	22.5
<b>Less say in job</b>	41.0	28.3	38.1	26.8	19.6	35.5
<b>Less skilled job</b>	28.6	23.5	28.6	20.9	16.1	27.4
<b>Lower paid job</b>	45.5	34.6	41.0	36.8	26.2	41.1
<b>Less interesting job</b>	31.4	19.4	26.5	21.4	17.2	25.0

Again, this pattern is consistent across the various items, but particularly noticeable with respect to employment loss and across the measures of job status loss. It can also be seen that those who reported that they felt they had a great deal, or quite a lot of, influence over changes at work experienced lower levels of fear across each of the measures. This suggests that developing policies which increase employee involvement in decision-making processes could reduce fears among employees. This may be especially relevant in the public sector, where fears have risen most sharply.

## Work intensification

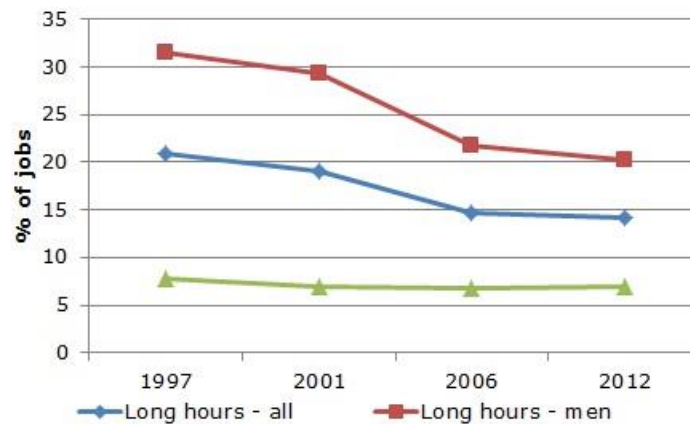
Problems of high workloads, or being required to work under pressure at speed, are known to be greater when high effort at work is not seen as fairly rewarded, or when levels of job control are low. SES 2012 investigates some of the issues around hard work and work intensification with a range of questions focusing on the demands of the job, and also on subjective responses by employees relating to how hard or how intensively they feel they are being asked to work.

Five main dimensions are identified:

- long hours – defined as a usual working week of 48 hours or more including any paid or unpaid overtime;
- hard work – defined as respondents strongly agreeing with the statement that job requires hard work;
- high speed jobs – where respondents report having to work at high speeds for at least three quarters of the time;
- high pressure jobs – where respondents have to work to tight deadlines for at least three quarters of the time;
- high strain jobs – where respondents agree or strongly agree that the job requires hard work and that they have little say over at least one of these areas – work intensity; task selection; task execution; and quality standards.

The survey found that the proportions of people reporting long hours had fallen since 2006. This follows from a reduction between 2001 and 2006 (see Figure 8). This change is almost entirely attributable to what is happening to male workers; the proportion of female workers reporting long hours has remained stable since 1997 at around 7%. By contrast, in 2012 one fifth of male workers reported long hours compared with 29% in 2001 and 22% in 2006.

*Figure 8: Long hours of work*



**Figure 8: Long hours of work**

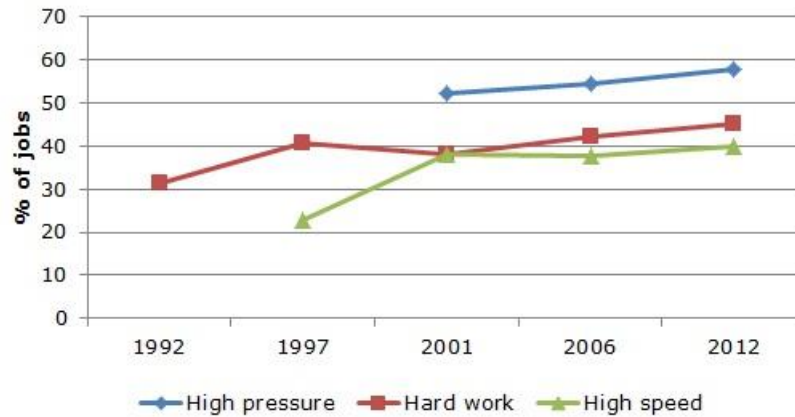
All measures of work intensity (high pressure, hard work and high speed work) show increases from the previous wave of the survey (see Figure 9). The hard work indicator is available for five survey waves and shows that, between 1992 and 1997, the proportion rose by 10 percentage points to just over 40%. Between 1997 and 2006 little change was observed before it rose again between 2006 and 2012 to just over 45%. Given the timing this might suggest that employers tend to seek increased effort from employees during recession. Given other findings about fear of job loss it could, however, be that employers' expectations are constant, yet employees feel that they need to work harder than previously.

The overall pattern for high-strain jobs (high effort coupled with low task discretion) indicates that the level has remained fairly constant since 2001 with just over one third of employees in such jobs. However, there has been a change in the gender profile of high-strain jobs. In 2006 greater proportions of women reported being in such jobs, which was broadly consistent with previous waves. Since 2006, though, men's likelihood of being in high strain jobs has increased, whereas for women it has fallen, with the result that, in 2012, high strain jobs are more common among male employees (37.0%) than female ones (32.5%).

A further breakdown of the figures for hard work shows that the greatest increases in jobs requiring hard work have occurred among female employees. In 1992 the gender gap was two percentage points whereas, by 2012, this had increased to eight percentage points. Although larger proportions of women reported having to work hard in the latest survey, women were also found to be reporting greater levels of job control; hence the reduction in the proportion of women experiencing high-strain jobs. When looking at the picture by public and private sectors it is seen that the increases have occurred much more rapidly in the public sector. In 1992, the proportion of all employees in the private sector reporting hard work (31.8%) was marginally higher than for the public sector (31.2%). By 2012, the figure in the public sector (52.5%) was 10 percentage points higher than for the private sector (42.2%).

*Figure 9: Work intensification*





**Figure 9: Work intensification**

SES 2012 shows that hard work is more common where technological change has taken place. Where computerisation or other ICT had recently been introduced the proportion of hard working jobs was around the 51% level for both of these changes. Where these changes had not occurred the figures were 42.3% for computerisation and 43.3% for other ICT changes. Surprisingly perhaps, no evidence is found of higher levels of hard work where there had been workforce reductions, even though fear is much higher where this has occurred.

## Commentary

The first findings of SES 2012 provide a snapshot of employees' experiences and perceptions of work, at a time of stagnation in the private sector and austerity in the public sector. As one of a series of surveys, it also throws light on changes that have occurred in recent years, particularly as a result of the recession (given that the previous survey was undertaken in 2006). The findings provide important indications of how fear and anxiety, and demands at work, have been experienced by employees in the context of recession. Moreover, it is useful from a policy perspective to understand how changes are being experienced by different groups within the labour force.

By measuring more than one dimension of key job-related phenomena, the survey allows for a greater depth of understanding. For example, although the proportion of workers engaged in a training activity increased between 2006 and 2012, the shift from 'long' (ten days or more) to 'short' training probably means a decrease in overall training investment. Similarly, the finds show that it is not involvement in team working as such which is associated with greater task discretion, but more intensive forms of team working involving self-management or autonomy in organising work.

One of the most important findings relates to the experience of fears about job loss, unfair treatment and job degradation and the perception employees have of the amount of influence they have over how changes are made which affect their day-to-day working lives. If employees feel that they have been involved in meaningful consultation, they have less anxiety. This suggests that employers – particularly in the public sector where fears have risen most sharply and where work has intensified most – might consider how to involve employees more effectively in decision-making processes.

The findings presented here give an overview of some of the issues which the survey has sought to investigate and they highlight some of the main associations. An edited collection of essays exploring issues in more detail is under preparation. Each chapter will adopt a similar approach by discussing a type of work or a section of the labour force in terms of the skills used, the



intensity of the job and the levels of discretion enjoyed. The aim of the published report is to develop policy responses which can deliver improved job quality for employees.

Duncan Adam, IER, University of Warwick

EF/14/02